

## PASSION SUNDAY

St. Mary's Church, Richmond VA

Fr. Michael Renninger

*Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Oh sometimes it causes me to tremble... Were you there when they crucified my Lord?*

In churches all around the country, Christians are singing this classic hymn as Holy Week begins. It's a good hymn because it raises such good questions: "were you there when they crucified my Lord. Were you there when they nailed him to the tree? Were you there when they laid him in the tomb?" Wonderful questions – a wonderful hymn.

But... There is a problem. The problem is this – no matter how many times you ask, "were you there," the answer is always "no." Were YOU there when they crucified my Lord? *No, you were not.* Were YOU there when they nailed him to the tree? *No.* Were you there when they laid him in the tomb? *No again.* No matter how many times you sing "were you there," the answer is always, "No, we were not."

But... *he is here.* Jesus is here. The crucified One is right here – in the midst of the community, in the Scriptures we proclaim, in the Eucharist we share. He is here! The One who brings us salvation is here!

When we listen to the Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ, we do not have to go back in time, or find our way back to Calvary. We were not there...but Christ has come here, to us. His passion is our passion. His crucifixion gives meaning to every cross that human beings have to carry. On that lonely hill in Jerusalem, LOVE got crucified. 2000 years later, our love still gets crucified.

When your love gets crucified, please remember – Christ *is here.* You never carry the cross alone.

He is here...when your heart gets broken.

He is here... when your body is overcome with illness.

He is here...when you can't find a job.

He is here...when you lose patience with your family.

He is here...your spouse is unfaithful or unkind.

He is here...when you are not sure how to pay your bills.

He is here...when your mother grows old, when your faith grows weak, when hope disappears.

When life hands you the cross, you can have hope, because Jesus is here, ready to help you carry that cross. And if Jesus gives us that kind of help, then we must help our neighbors carry their crosses too.

The crucifixion is happening in so many places right now:

The crucifixion is happening in Iraq and Afghanistan, where people continue to die.

The crucifixion is happening in Africa, where AIDS is still rampant.

The crucifixion is happening in Haiti and Chile, where earthquakes have left devastation in their wake.

The crucifixion is happening in abortion clinics, in poverty-stricken neighborhoods, in hospital rooms.

The crucifixion is happening wherever injustice occurs, where ignorance is victorious, where human beings are not respected and loved.

The passion of our Lord Jesus Christ is the greatest love story ever told. Why? Because never has one person loved so many people who did not deserve it! Think about it – no one deserved Jesus' love, or earned his love. But by the power of the Cross, he loved and forgave anyway.

He loved and forgave Judas, who betrayed him.

He loved and forgave Peter, who denied him.

he loved and forgave James and John, who slept through his agony.

He loved and forgave the crowd who arrested him, Pilate who condemned him, the criminal who mocked him. Jesus loved and forgave them all!

He forgave them – and he forgives you. Do you believe that? He is here today, ready to forgive you and love you, even if you do not feel like you deserve it.

He forgives you, when you don't pray.

He forgives you, when you don't follow the Gospel.

He forgives you when you are impure.

He forgives you when you are selfish.

He forgives you when you don't pay attention to the needs of your brothers and sisters.

This week...this holy week...you are invited to bring your life, your whole messy life, to the foot of Christ's cross. Cling to Christ crucified. We come to the cross saying "Lord have mercy," and

he does. He is here, having mercy on you. He is here, crucified and risen for you. He is here, in the breaking of the bread.

You were not there. But he is here. Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

And may the Lord be praised, now and forever.